

House Bill 543
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Seniors – State Supplement
House Appropriations Committee
March 6, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

House Bill 543 increases the state supplement of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for older adults 62 and older to a minimum of \$75 per month..

The Maryland Food Bank estimates that 1 in 3 Marylanders is at risk of food insecurity. A person who is food insecure does not have consistent access to healthy and nutritious food on any given day, and this problem persists in every area of the state. There are also communities and populations that are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, including communities of color, families with children, and older adults. The drivers of food insecurity are complex and often include additional factors such as low income, lack of reliable transportation, and access to healthcare.

SNAP benefits are federally funding based on household size and income eligibility and administered by the Maryland Department of Human Services. States however may provide additional funding at its discretion, and Maryland has chosen to do so to support those Marylanders who are most in need of financial assistance to feed themselves and their families. The additional benefits that HB 543 will provide to Marylanders struggling with food insecurity would be immediate and noticeable. More than 72% of Maryland families who receive SNAP benefits report facing financial difficulties. Financial instability is a major driver of food insecurity, so any additional assistance to household budgets is clearly needed. Communities and their resources may likely also benefit, as there will be increased spending power with SNAP benefits and the potential of additional funds for other areas of household spending.

Additionally, and most foundationally, food assistance benefits such as SNAP are a simple and proven effective method of combatting hunger and supporting food-insecure communities. The Maryland Food Bank knows that the demand for charitable food is often related to public benefits such as SNAP; for example, 95% of our partners saw an immediate increase in demand following the expiration of the SNAP emergency allotments in March 2023, and internet searches for terms such as “free food” were higher in the summer of 2023 than the summer of 2022 and have culminated in an average of 18% increase month over month since September 2023. Bolstering the food system by ensuring SNAP benefits are adequate and robust is a necessary tool in order to eradicate hunger for good in our state.

For these reasons, the Maryland Food Bank respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 543.